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Introducing another week of Future Trends — *tracking current global news stories that provide insight into the future.*

Here's what you need to know: Russian mercenary chief sets out ambitions for an “army with an ideology”, global decline in democracy is slowing, M23 rebels and government troops fail to uphold DRC ceasefire, AUKUS allies unveil submarine deal to counter China in the Pacific, France and Britain strike migration deal, vinyl records outsell CDs for first time since 1987.

SPECIAL EDITION: UKRAINE

Russian mercenary chief sets out ambitions for an 'army with an ideology'. The head of Russia's Wagner mercenary force said in an interview that he had ambitions to turn his private military company into an ["army with an ideology"](#) that would fight for justice in Russia.

Wagner Group recruits in schools and prisons, starts youth clubs. The group is offering pardons for criminal sentences to prisoners who take part in the war in Ukraine, as well as monthly payments to their relatives. In schools, the group are [targeting impressionable youth](#) and organising youth clubs.

Ukraine war generates record number of refugees. Russia's invasion triggered the [biggest wave of refugees](#) in Europe since World War II, with over 8 million having fled. While many have since returned, nearly 5 million are still estimated to be overseas

POLITICS

Global decline in democracy is slowing. [Democracy declined around the world](#) for the 17th consecutive year, but the pace of that decline has slowed and a turning point could be approaching, according to a report from Freedom House.

Iran and Saudi Arabia agree to restore relations. The two countries have agreed to re-establish diplomatic ties and reopen embassies within the next two months. The

successful talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Beijing are a diplomatic coup for China in [Middle East geopolitics](#).

Georgian ruling party drops 'foreign agents' bill but protests resume. Georgia's ruling party said it was withdrawing a bill on "foreign agents" after two nights of violent protests. Its opponents argued the bill was inspired by a similar law in Russia, that is used to [silence critics](#).

Rupert Murdoch questioned Fox News coverage of stolen US election claims. Rupert Murdoch said TV hosts Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham may have gone "too far" in their coverage of [voter fraud claims](#) after the 2020 US elections.

Moldova police say they foiled Russia-backed unrest plot. Moldovan police say they foiled a plot by groups of [Russian-backed actors](#), trained to cause mass unrest, during a protest against the country's new pro-Western government.

CONFLICT

M23 rebels and government troops fail to uphold DRC ceasefire. Angola will be sending troops to Eastern Congo, after a brokered truce failed to stop fighting in the country. The [M23 rebels](#) have captured swathes of territory in eastern DRC since re-emerging from dormancy in late 2021.

South Sudan president holds frank talks with his vice president. South Sudan President Salva Kiir held frank deliberations with opposition leader Vice President Riek Machar, a week after Kiir [breached a peace agreement](#) by sacking two top security ministers.

China says there will 'surely be conflict' with US if Washington does not change path. China's foreign minister said the US' perceptions and views of China were seriously distorted. He also said the US' handling of the spy balloon incident created a [diplomatic crisis](#).

Resistance to Israeli forces in the West Bank grows. Palestinian armed resistance to the Israeli occupation is growing, and boundaries between factions are blurring, as interests merge. Coordination of Palestinian fighters across cities lays the groundwork for a return to [full-scale conflict](#) with Israel.

IS assumes responsibility for deaths and injuries to dozens in Eastern Congo. [Islamic State](#) assumed responsibility for killing more than 35 and wounding dozens of Christians in Eastern Congo. The group highlighted that they used guns and knives to commit these atrocities and torched a house.

ECONOMICS

Egypt withdraws from UN grain treaty. Egypt, one of the world's largest wheat importers, has given notice it will withdraw at the end of June from a decades-old [UN grain treaty](#). The departure follows a period of turmoil in grain markets, linked to the war in Ukraine and concerns about global food security.

AUKUS allies unveil submarine deal to counter China in the Pacific. The US, Australia and the UK unveiled plans for a new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. The deal deepens the [AUKUS defense partnership](#) aimed at countering China in the Pacific and upgrading Australia's aging sub fleet.

Oil giant Saudi Aramco records historic \$161bn profit in 2022. Saudi Aramco has reported earning \$161 billion last year, claiming the highest-ever recorded annual profit by a publicly-listed company. The profit came off the back of [energy prices](#) rising after Russia launched its war on Ukraine.

Argentina's harvest suffers under worst drought in 60 years. Argentina, the world's top exporter of processed soy and third-highest source of corn, is in the grip of its [worst drought](#) in more than 60 years. This has led to repeated sharp cuts to harvest forecasts.

Australia's investment in renewable energy jumps 10 times from prior quarter. The investment of \$4.29 billion comes after the Australian Energy Market Operator warned of potential reliability gaps in the national power grid without urgent action to encourage more [clean energy](#) capacity and storage.

DEVELOPMENT

France and Britain strike migration deal. Britain will pay France around £480 million over three years, to try to [stop migrants travelling in small boats](#) across the Channel; as the two allies took a major step to end years of bickering in the post-Brexit era.

Canada's police probe alleged Chinese 'police stations' in Montreal. Police in Canada said they are investigating allegations that two Montreal-area centres are being used as [Chinese state-backed 'police stations'](#) to intimidate or harass Canadians of Chinese origin.

New idea for sucking up CO2 from air shows promise. A new way of sucking carbon dioxide from the air, and storing it in the sea, has been outlined by scientists. This [novel approach](#) captures carbon dioxide from the atmosphere up to three times more efficiently than current methods.

French Senate votes for Macron's pension plan, despite new protests. The French Senate adopted President Emmanuel Macron's [controversial pension reform plan](#), in the wake of a seventh day of demonstrations.

Researchers develop blood test for anxiety. The test examines RNA biomarkers in blood that can help objectively determine someone's [risk for developing anxiety](#), the severity of their current anxiety, and which therapies would best treat it.

SOCIAL

Vinyl records outsell CDs for first time since 1987. About 41 million [vinyl albums](#) were sold in 2022, compared with about 33 million CDs, according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

Airlines sue Dutch government over flight cuts. [Five airlines are suing the Dutch government](#) over plans to cut the number of flights operating from Europe's third-busiest airport. The government cited local concerns at Amsterdam Schiphol regarding noise pollution and the climate in its decision.

UN avoids catastrophic oil spill off Yemen. The UN has purchased a [crude carrier](#), to remove oil from a decaying vessel containing millions of barrels of crude oil, in order to avoid an ecological disaster in the Red Sea. Due to the Yemeni war, the vessel had not been maintained since 2015.

Multiple rescues required for hundreds of migrants off coast of Italy. The Italian coastguard launched multiple [rescue operations](#) to save hundreds of migrants packed aboard several boats off the toe of Italy, less than two weeks after at least 73 drowned in a shipwreck.

New technology helping women manage menopause. The [Thermaband bracelet](#) is powered by AI software that monitors the wearer's temperature and when it detects a hot flush, can deliver a cooling sensation. Alternatively, it can also provide heat, if required.

PEACEBUILDING

[Everyday Peace Indicators](#) is [supporting the Innovation Stream of California 100](#), a state-wide initiative to map an equitable, long-term policy future for the state. California 100 is bringing together diverse stakeholders from academic, public, private and civil society sectors across the state to address the most pressing policy issues, from police violence to health and education.

Local leaders and representatives of eight communities in Burkina Faso [met recently to promote peace and social cohesion](#). Over 500 people, including 300 women, participated. [Search for Common Ground](#) – Burkina Faso and the municipality of Ouahigouya organized the event within the framework of the project *Un Futur à Construire*, which is funded by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany and Denmark through the [PATRIP Foundation](#) and the [Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau](#).

Dozens of companies are developing [milk proteins made by yeasts or fungi](#). The “animal-free dairy” products of one California-based company are already on store shelves while 28 “precision fermentation” companies are gearing up to sell their milk proteins as ingredients for other food companies. These animal-free products do not contain cholesterol, lactose, growth hormones or antibiotics while their production processes release fewer greenhouse gases than cattle, which are said to be the [largest agricultural source of greenhouse gases worldwide](#).

Emi Kiyota, an internationally recognized leader on healthy aging, helps create [socially integrated and sustainable communities](#) that value elders and enable them to contribute to the community rather than be looked after. She has worked on [projects](#) in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Ivory Coast as well as Japan.